

Red Devil Redlegs: Fire Support in Operation Just Cause

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The 4th Battalion, 6th Infantry—4-6 IN (M)—assigned to the 2d Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Polk, Louisiana, deployed to Panama in September 1989. The Battalion took its usual complement of fire supporters from the 5th Battalion, 1st Field Artillery (5-1 FA).

During Operation Just Cause in December, the 4-6 IN became Task Force (TF) 4-6 and was very successful, having several nonstandard operations. The observations of its 5-1 FA fire supporters during those operations emphasize that FA must be flexible and prepared to meet the diverse contingencies possible in low-intensity conflict (LIC).

TF Organization and Mission

The 4-6 IN was attached to the 193d Infantry Brigade (Light) along with the 5th Battalion, 87th Infantry (Light), and 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry (Airborne). During Operation Just Cause, TF 4-6 was organized as follows: Team Delta, consisting of D/4-6 IN (M) with an additional mechanized platoon (2/C/4-6 IN(M)) and an engineer platoon (1/A/7 EN); B/4-6 IN (M); C/1-508 IN (Abn); and Team Armor (a platoon of M551 Sheridans and a platoon of Marine Corps light armored vehicles with 25-mm guns, or LAV-25s).

The mission of TF 4-6 was to isolate,

seize and secure Noriega's headquarters (the Commandancia) and the Panamanian Defense Force's (PDF's) buildings in the immediate vicinity. The TF 4-6 area of operations (AO) was approximately one kilometer square of a densely populated urban environment.

It accomplished the mission by having B Company (IN) and Team Delta assume platoon battle positions with 360-degree security. Team Armor provided fire support into the objective from its battle position on Ancon Hill, which was 500 meters from the Commandancia. (See Figure 1: TF 4-6 Command and Control and Fire Support Coordination Measures.)

The TF's fire support plan called for a 5-minute, 30-second preparation by two AC-130 aircraft, starting 30 seconds before H-Hour. The prep was designed to shock and suppress PDF soldiers in their billets while allowing TF 4-6 to assume its battle positions. Although the initial assault met fierce resistance, TF 4-6 occupied its positions and secured the area. The C/1-508 IN (Abn) conducted the clearing mission 14 hours after H-Hour.

Fire Support Observations

Fire support personnel from TF 4-6 made several observations about combat in Just Cause. In some areas, Redlegs need more training, the position of

fire support officers (FSOs) on the battlefield must be flexible and there were some equipment and fuze limitations. In addition, the fire supporters devised a targeting system for objectives in urban terrain that might be useful for others in LIC situations.

AC-130 Training

Before arriving in Panama, none of the fire support personnel with TF 4-6 had ever trained with or even had knowledge of the AC-130 aircraft. Obtaining information about the AC-130 was extremely difficult.

Although all TF 4-6 fire support personnel were able to call for and adjust AC-130 fires within the first couple of weeks in Panama, information on how to adjust fire with the AC-130 should be included in *FM6-30 Observed Fire Procedures*. Officer and NCO schooling at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, should include information about the AC-130, especially since LIC situations using them are more likely to occur in the future.

FSO Needs

The TF FSO needed his own vehicle with a four-net communications capability. To accomplish this, he used the Team Delta fire support team (FIST) M113 vehicle, forcing the Team Delta FSO and his radio-telephone operator (RTO) to ride in one of the platoon leader's vehicles.

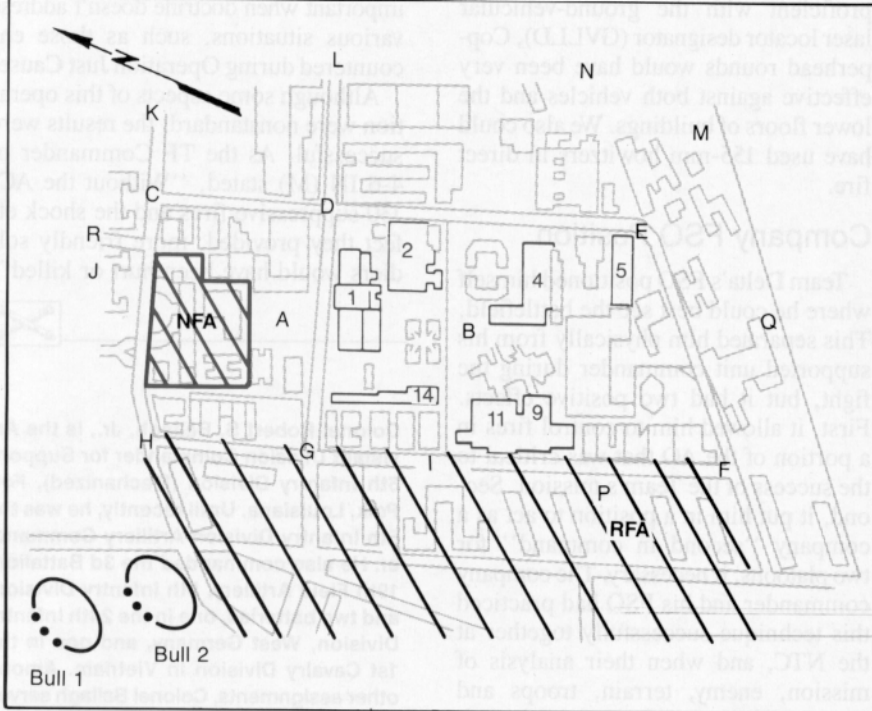


Figure 1: Command and Control

The TF FSO monitored the TF command net, battalion mortar net, AC-130 call-for-fire net and the brigade counterfire net. He wouldn't have been able to monitor the required nets if he had been in the TF commander's vehicle.

Also, the TF FSO stayed near Team Armor instead of collocating with the TF commander. This allowed the FSO to view most of the AO and control fires from all fire support assets. The TF FSO cleared and requested all fires for company fire support personnel. The rules of engagement, which demanded safeguarding the lives of many civilians in the AO and preventing fratricide in such a small AO with severely restricted visibility, made this centralized method of fire control necessary.

Experiences at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, have identified the need for a separate combat vehicle for the heavy TF FSO in mid-intensity warfare. Our experience

in Just Cause confirms this is also a valid requirement for the LIC environment.

Targeting System in Urban Terrain

The TF 4-6 AO was densely populated and required precise fires to avoid

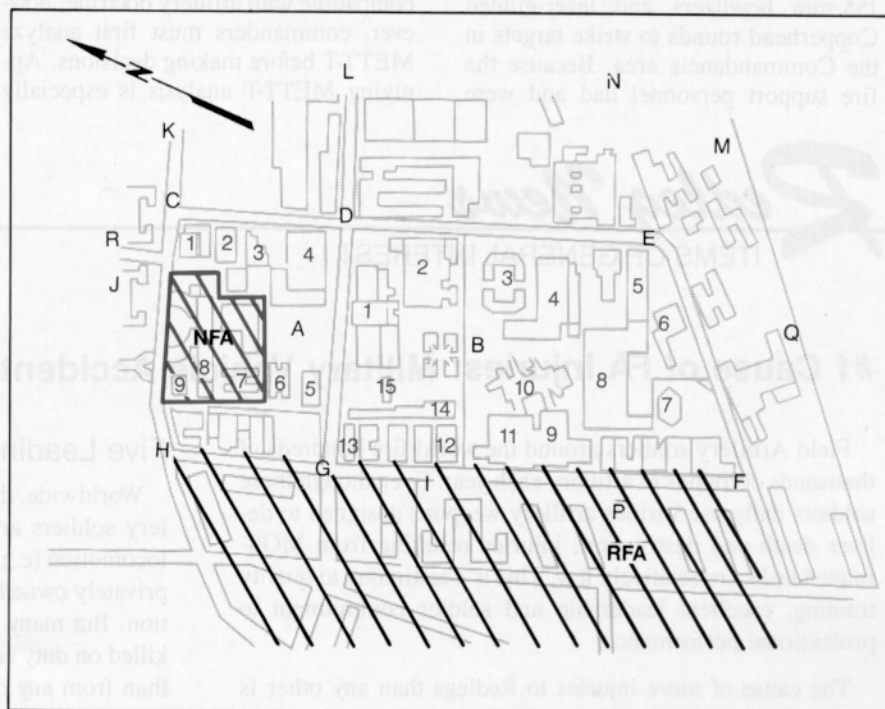


Figure 2: Urban Terrain Targeting System. TF 4-6 devised a graphic targeting system identifying the objective buildings in areas A and B, the platoon battle positions at letters C to N and the buildings numbered clockwise. The air, fire support and maneuver personnel all used the same overlay and graphic.

civilian and friendly casualties. To provide strict control over all fires onto the objective, the maneuver graphics section split the objective in half, with the main road into the objective the boundary between B Company and Team Delta. The two parts of the objective were lettered A and B, relating to B Company and Team Delta, respectively. All platoon battle positions were lettered from C to N. To identify the buildings in each company AO, the buildings were numbered clockwise. (See the Figure 2: Urban Terrain Targeting System.)

To call for fire with these graphics, the company fire support personnel gave a letter (A or B) and a building number (1-15) to the TF FSO. The TF FSO then relayed the request to the AC-130, using the same letter and number. Everyone—air crews, fire supporters and maneuver personnel—had the same overlay and graphics. This technique was key in providing timely, effective and safe fires.

Mortars in Urban Terrain

After assuming platoon battle positions, TF 4-6 units were all within 200 to 300 meters of the Commandancia. Although the 4th Battalion's 4.2-inch mortar platoon was prepared to fire, no fires were allowed because of the close proximity of friendly troops in the AO and the large number of helicopters and

AC-130s flying over the AO.

Air space allocation was extremely difficult during this operation. That, along with the closeness of friendly troops, stopped the 4th Battalion from firing any mortar platoon missions.

Concrete-Piercing Fuzes

The AC-130 prep fires and additional requested fires on the PDF buildings within the Commandancia complex were effective. However, the damage to the lower floors of those buildings was limited. The point-detonating fuzes used on the AC-130's 105-mm rounds caused all damage to be focused on the top floors; very limited damage was done to the lower floors.

Although most of the buildings were empty, if personnel had been in the lower floors, they would have survived the preparation fires and continued fighting. The need for concrete-piercing fuzes still exists within the fire support community.

Cannon Artillery

Although a battery of 105-mm howitzers assigned to the 193d Brigade was available in Panama City during Just Cause, the battery wasn't used for the same reasons that prohibited mortar fire. Consideration should have been given, however, to deploying and using 155-mm howitzers and laser-guided Copperhead rounds to strike targets in the Commandancia area. Because the fire support personnel had and were

proficient with the ground-vehicular laser locator designator (GVLLD), Copperhead rounds would have been very effective against both vehicles and the lower floors of buildings. We also could have used 155-mm howitzers in direct fire.

Company FSO Position

Team Delta's FSO positioned himself where he could best see the battlefield. This separated him physically from his supported unit commander during the fight, but it had two positive effects. First, it allowed him to control fires in a portion of the AO that was critical to the success of the Team's mission. Second, it put him in a position to act as a company "second in command" for two platoons, if necessary. The company commander and his FSO had practiced this technique successfully together at the NTC, and when their analysis of mission, enemy, terrain, troops and time available (METT-T) told them it would be appropriate in Just Cause, they felt comfortable doing so. In fact, during execution, the company FSO had to take charge of two platoons when they came under heavy fire.

Doctrine and METT-T

Some of the lessons of Panama are compatible with artillery doctrine; however, commanders must first analyze METT-T before making decisions. Applying METT-T analysis is especially

important when doctrine doesn't address various situations, such as those encountered during Operation Just Cause.

Although some aspects of this operation were nonstandard, the results were successful. As the TF Commander of 4-6 IN (M) stated, "Without the AC-130 suppressive fires and the shock effect they provided, more friendly soldiers would have been hurt or killed."



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Redleg News

ITEMS OF GENERAL INTEREST

#1 Cause of FA Injuries: Military Vehicle Accidents

Field Artillery soldiers around the world fire hundreds of thousands of rounds of artillery each year. Even though these soldiers daily use various artillery weapons designed to deliver death and destruction, injuries resulting from MOS-related tasks are relatively few. This is a testimony to quality training, excellent leadership and soldier commitment to professional performance.

The cause of more injuries to Redlegs than any other is Army motor vehicle accidents. And though units have an excellent record working with their weapons and other equipment, there's much they can do to reduce vehicle accidents and, thereby, Branch injuries and deaths.

Five Leading Causes of FA Injuries

Worldwide, the five leading causes of injury to Field Artillery soldiers are (1) military vehicle accidents, (2) human locomotion (e.g., slips, falls, etc.), (3) materiel handling, (4) privately owned vehicle accidents and (5) sports and recreation. But many more Field Artillery soldiers are injured or killed on duty each year from Army motor vehicle accidents than from any other cause.

Driver Errors

Analysis of these military vehicle accidents indicates driver error is a contributing factor in more than 80 percent